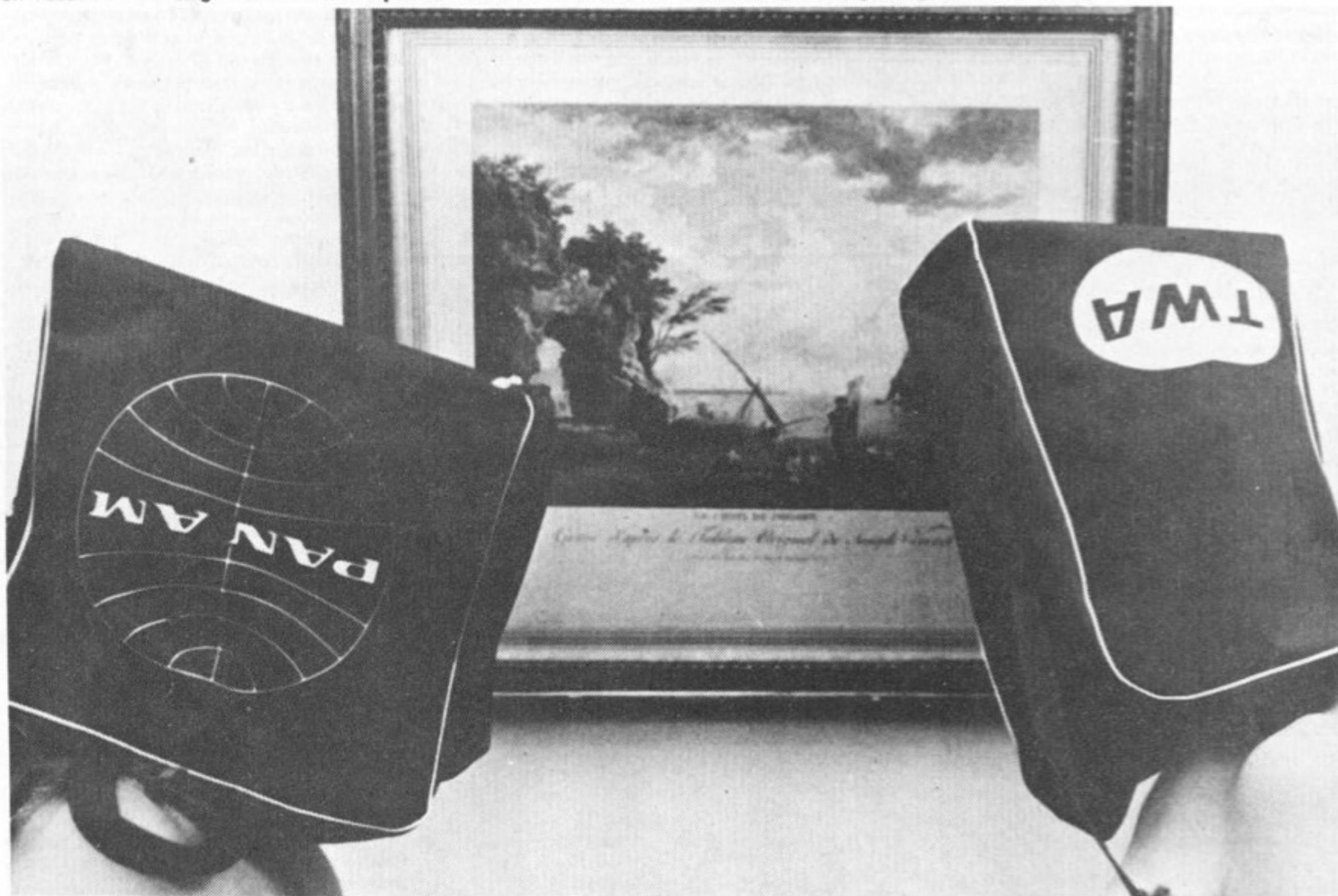


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Juliette and Marianne, Hired by American John Bogus, a war correspondent  
on Vacation from Saigon to undress and parade back and forth with PAN AM and TWA flight bags over their heads.



## TWO OR THREE THINGS I KNOW ABOUT HER

Chuck Kleinhans



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Jean-Luc Godard's innovations in form and content during the past decade have placed him in an international vanguard of filmmakers. Even with the recent growth (or is it recognition?) of feminist filmmaking, particularly in the US, Godard remains near the front of filmmakers presenting an anti-sexist perspective. This is seen most obviously in *Tout Va Bien* (*Everything's OK*, 1972), the most recent Godard-Gorin film, which portrays, in part, the growth and expression of feminist consciousness in the character played by Jane Fonda. Similarly, the antecedent Godard-Gorin creation, *Vladimir and Rosa*, presented an extended monologue by a feminist activist character (who speaks while silkscreening T-shirts with the clenched fist and female sign symbol), and a dialogue between her and a man on women's liberation.

From his early films on, Godard's sympathetic use of female protagonists has been remarkable. To take one preeminent example, in *Contempt* he treated Brigitte Bardot as a woman with a range of emotions, not merely a pouting sex symbol or a "dumb broad" comic actress. As Siew-Hwa Beh pointed out in her review (*Women & Film*, no. 1), *Vivre Sa Vie* (1962) prefigures the treatment of women found in the post-68 political films. However Godard's move from the sympathetic portrayal of a female protagonist (*Vivre Sa Vie*) to a willingness to deal with explicitly feminist content in his most recent films was not made in one step. *2 or 3 Things I Know About Her* (1967) is a crucial film in this development, for in taking up again the theme of prostitution, Godard arrives at the limit of his previous analysis and begins to break into the new, and more explicitly Marxist analysis that will inform his post-68 films. *2 or 3 Things* should not be seen as one of the last films of Godard's pre-political period, but one of a group (with *Made in USA*, *La Chinoise*, and *Weekend*) that provides his springboard into the May-June 1968 strike, and into the explicitly political films which followed.

*2 or 3 Things*, although it presents a day in the life of one woman, and shows and comments on women's situation in modern Paris, cannot be satisfactorily approached only on the level of content, theme, narrative, and ideas. To obtain a fuller understanding one must also take into account the form and style Godard uses, particularly various anti-narrative and anti-sympathetic devices. In *2 or 3 Things* Godard is simultaneously raising socio-political questions on the one hand and aesthetic questions on the other, and raising these questions both in form and content. When making this film he was working within the dominant Western ideology — bourgeois thought. Restless within that world view, in *2 or 3 Things* Godard stretches it to its limits, both in style and ideas.

## A Day In The Life

The narrative of *2 or 3 Things* portrays one day in the life of Juliette Hanson (Marina Vlady). Juliette is shown at home — washing dinner dishes, reading a magazine, and putting the two kids to bed — while her husband and his buddy listen to a short wave radio. The next morning Juliette leaves off the youngest child while she goes from her suburban apartment complex to the center of Paris. She shops for clothes, has a coke in a cafe where she talks with a woman friend and is annoyed by a pimp. Later she is seen in a hotel room with a customer, a young fellow who works in the subway. Following this encounter she goes to a beauty salon where her friend Marianne works. The pair leave to sell themselves to an American, afterwards dropping by the service station where Juliette's husband works. Juliette returns home to fix dinner, put the kids to bed, and read in bed with her husband.

However to call this sequence of events a narrative is deceiving, for Godard breaks up the sequence by inserting visual and audio asides and overlays, digressions on philosophic questions by the characters and by Godard himself (off camera). There is no effort made to present Juliette as a "character" in the usual literary or cinematic sense. The reason for a flat presentation of her is twofold, and is an example of Godard's combining formal and content concerns. First, Juliette is consistently shown as being emotionless and one-dimensional because she embodies the destructive effects of modern society on the individual. Secondly, Godard deliberately employs stylistic devices to present a very flat Juliette in order to prevent the audience from forming a close identification with her. Instead of letting us feel "with" her, Godard forces us to see Juliette in the context of her immediate and social situation, and to view both her and the situation with a certain critical distance. One short scene from Juliette's life can illustrate this duality. The scene takes place in the kitchen upon the couple's return. (*Medium shot of Juliette, followed by Robert.*)

R. Ahh, . . . we've arrived!

J. Arrived where?

R. (*going off camera*) Home.

J. And after that, what are we going to do?

R. (*off*) Sleep . . . What do you mean?

J. And after that?

R. (*Off*) You get up.

J. (*unpacking the groceries*) And after that?

R. (*off*) The same. You'll begin again . . . (*J. opens a cupboard and puts in a box of macaroni*) You'll work. You'll eat.

J. And after that?

(*R. returns on camera and faces her. He lifts his glasses.*)

R. I don't know . . . (*pause, he looks at her and puts away his glasses*) Die.

J. And after that?

(*Cut to the gauges of a gasoline pump as it goes from 00.00 to 01.10 litres.*)

Here we have Robert's initial self-evident statement and the ensuing activity of unpacking the groceries juxtaposed with Juliette's basic questioning of life. In most cinema one would expect such philosophic searching to be an intense moment when it occurs, as it does here, near the end of the film. Yet it is nothing of the sort; everything is flattened out, and the kitchen routine is not a counterpoint to the dialogue, but on approximately the same level of significance. Life, questioning of life, unpacking, and digits all exist equally. Vlady, in her acting here, as throughout the film, uses little facial or body expression, and minimal inflection or intonation, which matches Juliette's condition. Juliette is unable to link the emotional and personal with the intellectual and abstract. Yet our response is, by the very flatness of the presentation, not an empathetic one with Juliette in her deepening alienation. Her questioning of life does not lead us to think she is contemplating suicide. Rather, our response at this point, and generally throughout the film, is to see Juliette's life critically and with self-awareness and thereby respond to it more intellectually. The same dialogue could be played in tear-jerker style, evoking a pathetic heroine's distress. However Godard emphatically does not attempt a sentimental portrayal of Juliette but rather a rationale of her alienated condition.

## Women and Society

Bourgeois protest cinema does not extend beyond the scope of liberal analysis and liberal panaceas. It can portray the oppression of women (or any other oppressed group) under the status quo. Yet because it tends to show the plight of an individual woman and evoke an anger and possibly a pity, it also shows a basic powerlessness: what can one person do against the social order? At most it posits as remedy an individual rather than a collective solution; one woman's victory, rather than a change in the condition of all women. In portraying Juliette, Godard tries,



Juliette with client ... Godard uses camera framing to show the mechanical flatness of and alienation inherent in the transaction.





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unsuccessfully in the end, to break through the limits of liberal thought.

While dealing most concretely with Juliette's life, he also examines the lives of other working class women, and in a larger context examines Paris, and by implication modern Western society. Juliette's situation is the most specific level of Godard's examination, and he sees her casual prostitution as a particular example of a larger social condition. As in *Vivre Sa Vie* the metaphor of prostitution expands beyond the individual. One of his sources for the film was a journalistic exposé of prostitution in large apartment complexes. Godard said that the topic expressed one of his basic ideas: "In order to live in today's Parisian society, one is forced, at whatever level one is, at whatever station one has, to prostitute oneself in one manner or another, or to live according to laws which recall those of prostitution. A factory worker prostitutes himself three-fourths of the time in this manner: he is paid to do a job which he doesn't want to do . . . In modern industrial society, prostitution is the normal condition."

In *2 or 2 Things* we repeatedly see the limits placed on contemporary women: in the clothing shop employees, folding and arranging clothes and smiling at customers; in the pages of the French equivalent of *Playboy*, a garish and stylized Twiggy; in a woman trying to strike up a cafe conversation with Juliette's husband. She is rebuffed for her forwardness (he is busy "writing" and then he "starts" the conversation with her and works her into a putdown situation). Most poignantly shown in dialogue, is a cafe encounter between an older man ("Ivanov", the Nobel Prize winner, we are told) and an adolescent woman who admires him and who is then rebuffed by his deliberate professorial aloofness.

The situation of women, as portrayed in *2 or 3 Things*, is to be exploited, to be driven into prostitution, into being an object. Society has turned everyone into a consumer of everyone else. Men, being on top, consume women. Juliette reads aloud a description of the wondrous effects to be gained by a new hosiery to her husband and his buddy. As the husband scorns the idiocy of the statement, Juliette responds by citing authority: "Madame *Express*", the women's page of a French newsweekly. More derision. Juliette leaves, to tend the children, and the buddy asks the husband how he paid for his new car. The husband then boasts that Juliette found the money (obviously through her prostitution) and the friend wishes he were so lucky . . . consumers all. Godard tells us that it was actually the husband who asked Juliette to sell herself, to keep up the standard of living. Money is needed for the comforts and conveniences: hot water, rent, television, auto, washing machine, vacation. Although men are portrayed unsympathetically throughout the film, Godard does not find them the

source of women's situation, but focuses on the situation of women as representative of a general social disorder.

The breakdown of normal or humane society is repeatedly symbolized by the inhuman scale of the Le Courbousier-style apartment complexes, and by the repeated assault of street noise and construction sounds which intrude into the sound track. In this kind of life, Juliette's disconnected passages of an epistemological monologue on language, reality, and so on, which match and counterpoint Godard's sound-track statements on the same subjects, do not seem so discordant or curious. While a working class wife, mother of two, and part-time prostitute like Juliette cannot in normal probability be expected to articulate epistemological questions on the level that Marina Vlady playing Juliette does, her questioning functions as Godard's symbolic or metaphoric statement on Juliette's condition. In the breakdown of authentic human life, everything is called into question, including the nature of bourgeois reality and how we are to know that reality. In this sense the philosophic verbiage running through the film is not idle, but integral, for within the parameters of bourgeois ideology, phenomenologists and epistemologists have explored the effects of mass society on the individual and the nature of alienation from physical and social worlds as well as anyone else. Thus an off-camera interviewer speaks to a young boy (he is also off) in one sequence and asks, "What does your father do?" "He is in aviation." "Your mother?" "My mother . . . She doesn't work." The philosophic level intersects with the everyday . . . a mother who doesn't have a job is a form of non-being . . . there is no word for the boy to complete the phrase, "she is . . .", for housework and child care are not considered "work".

In *2 or 3 Things* Godard is explicit and devastating in his portrayal of the effects of modern society. The "Her" ("Elle") in the title is not Marina Vlady or Juliette, but, as the initial title indicates, the Parisian region. The film's trailer is even more explicit about what "Elle" is: "the cruelty of neo-capitalism, prostitution, the Parisian region, the bathroom that 70% of the French don't have, the terrible law of apartment complexes, physical love, modern life, the war in Vietnam, the modern call-girl, the death of contemporary beauty, the circulation of ideas, the gestapo of structures." Yet for all of Godard's ability to show effects, and to find a series of things to attack, from advanced industrial capitalism to the lack of beauty, he does not find basic causes for the conditions he describes. He has no historical context which shows why or how things evolved this way, and he presents no solution. The film ends with a lawn with various brightly colored packages of consumer products on it, and Godard as narrator telling us that that he has returned to zero, and that it is necessary to start from there.

## The Importance Of Godard's Style

The meaning or "message" of *2 or 3 Things* is not simply the content as discussed so far, but the content as it is shaped by the form of the film. In its style, the film works within bourgeois form, yet chaffs at its restrictions. An example is the depiction of Juliette. As I pointed out, Godard does not let us form a sympathetic bond with Juliette. This is accomplished in a number of ways, such as Godard interrupting the minimal narrative of her day with film statements by and about other women, shots and sounds of Parisian construction, shots of book covers, and discourses on epistemology and cinematic art.

We are first introduced not to Juliette, but to Marina Vlady, and then a few seconds later to Marina Vlady playing the role of Juliette. The intent of this device is explicitly Brechtian, for Godard is seeking to distance the audience from the screen action and to inhibit their falling into sympathy with a conventional character in a conventional narrative. We are, through this and other distancing devices, never to become too interested in what happens to or what will happen to Juliette or the other characters presented. Suspense is written off, and in its place is analysis and criticism. Despite a certain similarity in the juxtaposition of "illusion" and "reality" with the puzzle-like exploration of those two concepts in Alain Resnais's *Last Year at Marienbad*, the effect of Godard's film is not to stimulate our interest in the puzzle, but to force a more intellectual and critical viewing of the action, rather than an uncritical or emotional one. Marina Vlady's acting style in the film contributes to this effect. She does not play naturalistically, but performs an action, such as washing dishes, or shopping in a clothing store, frequently turning her full face to the camera and delivering lines with unusually long pauses between phrases. Some of the lines are delivered as responses to an off-camera interrogator (the audience does not hear the question); others are delivered by her without preparation. In this case the line was given to her by Godard, who used a small radio receiver hidden behind her ear.

The particular acting style Godard elicits from his actresses and actors has two functions. On one hand, as noted, it inhibits a sympathetic response to the character (one reason many viewers find Godard's films of this period "irritating" — a complaint he would have taken as proof he had achieved the desired effect). At the same time, Vlady's acting style symbolically stands for the fractured nature of Juliette's life, and for the complete banality of it all. For example, in the clothing store sequence, Juliette wanders in the store aimlessly looking at items, asking to try on a coat that she doesn't try on, and



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Godard's social criticism in *2 or 3 Things* is like a piece of sustained satire which can depict and condemn but which cannot offer any solutions.





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finally deciding on a dress in the most disinterested manner. The mechanical and unfocused nature of her other activity makes a point, that her activity is dehumanized in a consumer society.

In another sequence, Juliette enters a hotel room with a young man, but no titillating prostitute and customer scene takes place. Instead the camera treats the two as separate entities, usually showing only one at a time, with the other speaking off-camera. Neither takes any clothes off. Juliette puts on a bright red lipstick, and as she speaks in a distracted and unconnected monologue, facing the camera, the wide screen cuts her face above the chin and at the eyebrows. The wide screen lens distorts her face, forcing it out of ordinary perspective. In this sequence Godard does not intend to present the audience with a realistic portrayal of an encounter between prostitute and customer which develops the prostitute's character (as in, say, *Klute*, and its establishing scenes of Bree as prostitute, where we see her distance from her "job" when she sneaks a look at her watch during intercourse). Rather, Godard uses camera framing instead of emphasizing the participants or the action to show the mechanical flatness of and alienation inherent in the transaction. Godard is not presenting the *truth*, in the sense of presenting something which we are to take as being "like real life" (and incidentally, or not-so-incidentally, titillating the audience by presenting the forbidden — with, of course, a "redeeming social value"). Godard attempts that very difficult trick of presenting us with banality, and commenting upon it. Rather than a "slice of Life" carefully sliced for sensationalism and box office, Godard shows the ordinariness of the incident. *This*, Godard is saying is the true reality of our everyday world, and beyond the appearance of the trivial there is a social structure.

Juliette's other scene as a prostitute is similar. Taken to a very exclusive hotel by her friend, Marianne, they are hired by an American, who wears a T-shirt with an American flag printed on the front and who tells us his name is John Bogus, a war correspondent on vacation from Saigon. He photographs them and has the pair undress and then parade back and forth with Pan Am and TWA flight bags over their heads (shot from the neck up). Juliette ends the scene with an epistemological monologue juxtaposed with news of Vietnam and sounds of war. No pretense is made that the journalist is "real" or even an adequate caricature of an American correspondent. His statements, often delivered full face to the camera, are intended to show his own alienation ("one dead Vietcong costs the US treasury a million dollars. President Johnson could buy 20,000 girls like these for that price."). It is said without affect or irony, delivered flat and deadpan, as if he were mechanically reporting a tired joke heard in a Saigon bar. The conversations are non-conversations, the encounter

is a non-encounter.

Marianne: "Tell me, your T-shirt, it's *America uber alles*?"

American: "Yes . . . but it's they who invented the jeep and the napalm."

Marianne: " . . . Yes, the city is a construction in space . . . The mobile elements of the city . . . I don't know. The inhabitants . . . Yes, the mobile elements are as important as the fixed elements . . . and even when it is banal, the spectacle of the city is able to provoke a very special pleasure . . ."

There is no logical flow to such dialogue; this is characteristic of the film, for Godard is presenting a social world in which communication hardly takes place and in which one's own thoughts hardly develop. The theme is not unusual in Godard's films; it forms the bulk of his earlier film, *Alphaville*, for example. Alphaville was a city which made no sense to the intruder, and no sense to the inhabitants. Yet the city of Alphaville was controlled, there was a consciousness, however strange and deranged, at the center. The Paris of *2 or 3 Things*, for all its surface familiarity, suffers an even worse illness, for there is no one in the film to articulate that this is chaos. Instead everyone is trapped in it. Even Godard, it seems, with his off-camera philosophic monologues which break in from time to time, is unable to make a statement, to conclude anything. Characters and director are trapped either in the banality and alienation of social relations, or the ethereal abstractness of philosophy.

In the beauty salon sequence, a woman under a hair dryer (shot profile, thereby lessening expressiveness) appears long enough to say, without any context as to why she says it, "I am very careful when crossing streets. I think of accidents before they happen. And if my life ended. . . unemployment . . . illness . . . old age . . . death? Never, . . . I have no plans for the future because the horizon is closed . . ." Random thoughts from an alienated life . . . that is about all one can surmise.

Repeatedly in the film, Godard comments on the situation of women, using a variety of styles. At times a fairly direct statement is made in a typical documentary style: a brief shot of a woman cashier in a supermarket, ringing items; a long lens shot of a prostitute leaning against a wall and then approached by a pimp; a woman of about forty facing the camera, in on-the-street interview style, explaining that she's too old to get a job as a secretary, though qualified, so she sells her body. Yet even in using this style, Godard deliberately breaks any residual *cinéma vérité* expectations. The woman's monologue has an unbroken soundtrack but the visual track is intercut with brief tales of a supermarket sign, an apartment complex, a furniture display, and other details of Godard's plastic Paris.

Other styles are used as well, resulting in a deliberate juxtaposition that forces attentiveness to the details of the content. In a comic passage we find an old man in his modern apartment, simultaneously running a baby-sitting service (the parents pay in commodities, underlining the critique of the consumer society), and renting the bedrooms for assignations. (When the old fellow pokes his head in one bedroom, Godard has fun with the voyeuristic expectation, by presenting a fellow in working class dress expressionlessly stroking the leg of a young woman who is equally expressionless). Juliette drops off her daughter, and the camera pans out the window, catching her on the sidewalk, and a cop dragging two arrested men along . . . the comic moment ends abruptly.

In a romantic and poetic moment, rare in Godard's films of this period, Paulette, a young Algerian woman who works in the beauty salon confesses in close-up,

I couldn't make it as a secretary. (pause) No, I don't believe in the future. I take walks . . . I don't like to be closed in. When I'm able, I read. Yes, I like to study men's character . . . I like to walk . . . to climb . . . to ride a bicycle. Film: two or three times a month. But not in the summer . . . The theatre? I've never been. But I would like it a lot. I prefer reading. Biographies. To study the life of men . . . their character, their work . . . Travel stories, ancient history. A tree. Later, when I'll be married to Francois. . . (pause) What else would I do? A lot of ordinary things. (She smiles.)

At such a moment Godard's intended distancing of the spectator from the screen breaks down. Paulette's melancholy acceptance of her life's limits as proscribed does force an empathetic response, and in fact it is even stronger than it would have been had the body of the film constantly allowed such uncritical viewing. Here a working class woman is portrayed in a straightforward manner, and the sympathy evoked is for her sex and her class. Paulette is shown seriously and with dignity as a worthy person who deserves respect.

## Social and Cinematic Criticism

To say that Godard is a social critic is to state the obvious. To point out that Godard when making this film was fascinated with questions of reality, existence, and how people know the world they live in is clear from viewing the film itself. What is not so explicit is the relationship of Godard's socio-political and philosophic questioning to the cinematic and aesthetic choices made in *2 or 3 Things*. The means of expression employed in the film are actually correlative with the social, political, and philosophic theories it



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contains.

*2 or 3 Things* is one of Godard's more sociological films, but in it Godard the social pathologist is constantly running up against Godard the filmmaker. Both roles are combined in Godard's decision that *2 or 3 Things* be a documentary (of sorts), a film essay, rather than a fictional narration. Yet Godard is also working in the tradition of 19th century prose realists. Like Balzac and Zola, he records the sound and sights of daily life, and he depicts scenes from the urban milieu, often based on newspaper accounts: a woman who takes baths without realizing that the gas to heat the water must be paid for, a couple who make love in the apartment's basement since there is no privacy elsewhere, an old fellow in the highrise who lets out his rooms for prostitution since new construction has eliminated the small *hotel de passe*. Like Flaubert, Godard portrays the positivist idiocy of bourgeois lumpenintellectuals in a cafe scene, when he reintroduces Flaubert's two archetypes of mediocrity, Bouvard and Pécuchet.

Yet the realist and documentary tradition has an inherent bias that Godard senses and dislikes. Documentary realism turns the thing viewed into an object of contemplation. It freezes process into immobility; it ends in a reification of life. In such a situation there is a limit, for the film then cannot be a source of action, but only of reflection. Faced with the dilemma and the limit of documentary, Godard repeats a 19th century solution: he attacks documentary on a formal level by breaking it into fragments, much as modernist writers have done (Proust, the *nouveau roman*). Yet even that change ends in a cul-de-sac, and he attempts another solution by making the work self-reflective (as Gide and others have done with the novel). By adding his own commentary on the making of the film, on his choices, especially in its images, and speculating on reality and the semantics of language and visual communication, Godard attempts a breakthrough. Yet this too is a 19th century solution; he shows several times a gas station sign, "AZUR" (azure), in uptilted shots with the sky as background. This is a repetition of Mallarmé's search, with the other Symbolist poets, for "L'Azur" — a word Mallarmé used to symbolize the absolute and ineffable.

This Godardian dualism of objective description in the Realist tradition, and extreme subjective description in the Symbolist tradition is not schizophrenic, but rather an attempt to bridge the basic contradiction of European Romanticism — the recognition of subjective individuality and the simultaneous concrete fact of humanity's social nature. This contradiction broke into the opposed realist and symbolist camps in all the arts in 19th century France, but Godard, from the vantage point of a century, attempts a synthesis. In making *2 or 3 Things*, Godard could not

go into the ethereal realms of Symbolist thought. Nor could he, it seems, return to bourgeois narrative cinema and be content with giving the impression of reality (even when reality is broken into parts, as in *Vivre Sa Vie*), for the impression that is gained by the audience is both a recognition and a mystification. It is a recognition in that what we see and hear is "familiar," and it is a mystification because detail obscures basic questions such as "Why is it like this?" and the flow of the plot implies that life is linear, sequential, and has a logical development. Traditional narrative runs counter, on a formal level, to Godard's wish in this film, to explore static concepts of liberal philosophy and what he felt was the random and meaningless nature of alienated life.

*2 or 3 Things* doesn't rest easily in its self-reflective mode, though many of the film's reviewers focused on the nature of cinematic art as the central concern of the director in making the film (particularly the Godard commentary which accompanied an extreme closeup of a cup of coffee.) Actually I think Godard's circular examination of the nature of film within the film is unsuccessful in his own terms, and it is the realistic content, the prostitution metaphor, which remains with the audience after viewing, and which has seemed the director's central concern to me after several viewings. Yet Godard can intermittently combine the two concerns. In one of those fine moments in which Godard, at the end of the film, is able to draw on what he has taught us to that point, Juliette's 10 year old son reads his mother a school essay on "comradeship." The child likes the nice girls, the ones who are pretty and subservient, but hates the ones with glasses, the smart ones, etc. His socialization is connected with his naive efforts as an essayist. Social pathology and art combine; social ideology mediates expression.

All of Godard's previous concerns are etched into *2 or 3 Things* which is why the film is so remarkably dense. Virtually everything is commented on directly, or indirectly through image, sound and juxtaposition. Life is presented as a world of objects: the innards of a radio, high rise apartments, furniture, signs, book titles, and other physical objects. Yet the people and their social world is objectified as well. Conversations are never shot over the shoulder of one character facing another. When both are shown, both are usually on the same axis, facing the camera, or looking so that their eyes do not meet, or more typically, one person is off camera. Relationships hardly seem to exist. Juliette and the young man who works in the metro move about talking in a cheap hotel room, virtually oblivious of each other's presence, just as if they had been crowded together by accident in the subway. Thus the prostitution metaphor becomes the ultimate statement on the reification of sexuality and physical love. Indeed, people and their interactions are made to seem

objects. As Marianne muses in a passage quoted above, the buildings of a city are its stationary objects, the people are its mobile objects.

From this perspective, the film is not *about* the situation of Parisian women, any more than it is *about* the Vietnam war, which is also treated. Both are taken as specific examples of a general malaise. Thus Juliette's story is universal. Such an analysis of society is an extension of Godard's view in *Vivre Sa Vie*, in which cause and effect are ignored or unknown, and where motives are not clear; all we are presented with are objective situations. Yet such a mere showing or presenting is also a limit on thought, for without explanation all one can do is present or ponder a situation, but not probe why or how it came to exist, or how it could be significantly changed. At this point then, Godard is at the limit of a radical but still bourgeois critique of society, and the new element in his post-68 political films becomes the finding of causes for effects, and showing how change could take place.

Godard's social criticism in *2 or 3 Things*, is like a piece of sustained satire (say, Swift's "A Modest Proposal"), which can depict and condemn, but which cannot offer any solutions. Within the film, Godard's thought can only be circular. He announces at the end that he was returned to zero and must start again from there. Since there is no history in the film, only incidents arranged sequentially, since all is reified and process is not shown, this statement is logical within the context of the film. At this stage of his own subjective development, then, Godard is at the limit of a negative consideration of society, and specifically of dealing with society's sexism. He can show exploitation of women, but he can offer no solutions. All is in doubt and frozen . . . we are still in Eliot's Wasteland, motionless and affectless spectators in an incessant din of urban sound and the dehumanizing visual assaults of advertising.

Yet there is a hint of the break that Godard will make, at the end of the second cafe scene — another of those moments when all previous action collapses to provide a new insight. The indefatigable compilers of phrases, Bouvard and Pécuchet sit behind piles of books, from which they select and transcribe phrases at random. Pécuchet gets some food, and as he munches, his partner drones on; the barman asks what he'd like next. He asks for a "mystère" (literally "mystery, the mysterious" also an ice cream dessert). As Bouvard reads a passage of phenomenology about "thought" and "being" the barman shouts, "There isn't any mystery," (Godardian punning, no desert and no ineffable) and Pécuchet stares at the camera as if some new thought had occurred to him — phenomenology and gastronomy combine; the abstract ideal and the concrete material fuse. Perhaps, just perhaps, this is Godard's point of abolishing non-materialist thought.